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140924Z Mar 01

2001HANOI00598 - CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL PTQ1157

PAGE 01 HANOI 00598 01 OF 02 150056Z  
ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	SMEC-00	SRPP-00
	DS-00	EB-00	ED-01	FBIE-00	VC-00	HHS-01	H-01
	SSA-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01
	NSAE-00	OIC-02	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00
	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	PMB-00
	DSCC-00	PRM-01	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/012W

-----D1DEA7 150341Z /38

FM AMEMBASSY HANOI  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2235  
INFO NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
APEC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY  
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI//J5/FPA// PRIORITY  
DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000598

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL, PRM, INR

NSC FOR EAST ASIAN DIRECTORATE  
SECDEF FOR ISA/EAP STERN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/10  
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PAGE 02 HANOI 00598 01 OF 02 150056Z  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [SOCI](#) [VM](#) [ETMIN](#) [HUMANR](#) [RELFREE](#)  
SUBJECT: DIFFERENT VIEW OF HIGHLAND EVENTS

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY DENNIS G. HARTER, CHARGE  
D'AFFAIRES, REASONS: 1.5 B AND D.

2. (C) SWEDISH DCM TOLD CHARGE SHE BELIEVED THE  
REPORTS OF UNREST IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS HAVE BEEN  
HIGHLY EXAGGERATED AND BELIEVES FIRST DEMONSTRATIONS  
OCCURRED IN LATE JANUARY WELL BEFORE PUBLICITY OF  
FEBRUARY EVENTS HIT THE U.S. AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL  
REPORTING. SHE CLAIMS THE TWO RELIGIOUS WORKERS WHO  
WERE DETAINED IN LATE JANUARY WERE DETAINED BECAUSE OF  
DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE AREA BUT ALSO ASSERTS THE  
DEMONSTRATIONS HAD LITTLE OR NO RELIGIOUS CONNECTIONS.  
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT APPARENTLY RELEASED THESE  
INDIVIDUALS RATHER QUICKLY AFTER DECIDING THEIR  
INITIAL ARREST WAS UNWARRANTED. DCM DAHLIN SAID THERE  
ARE A NUMBER OF REASONS FOR THE PROBLEMS IN THE  
HIGHLANDS AND THE MOST SERIOUS IS THE ISSUE OF LAND  
USAGE.

3. (C) ACCORDING TO DCM DAHLIN, HANOI AUTHORITIES  
DECIDED IN JANUARY TO OPT FOR THE LARGE-SCALE  
DAM/ELECTRICITY PROJECT IN SON LA RATHER THAN THE  
SMALLER VERSION WHICH WOULD HAVE REQUIRED LESS  
DISLOCATION OF THE LOCAL POPULATION. THIS DECISION  
MEANT THAT 150,000 PEOPLE WILL HAVE TO BE RELOCATED  
OUT OF THE SON LA REGION AND THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS WAS  
DESIGNATED TO RECEIVE THESE INDIVIDUALS/FAMILIES. IN  
ADDITION TO LOCAL CONCERNS ABOUT THE EXPANSION OF  
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PAGE 03 HANOI 00598 01 OF 02 150056Z  
PLANTATION AGRICULTURE, RELOCATION OF POOR VIETNAMESE  
INTO THE HIGHLANDS AND THEIR CONSEQUENT OCCUPATION OF  
TRADITIONAL TRIBAL LANDS, THIS NEW INFLUX OF PEOPLE  
APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN A MAJOR CAUSE OF LOCAL CONCERN.

4. (C) DAHLIN EXPLAINED THAT THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND  
THE LOCAL MILITIA/POLICE FORCES REPRESENT THE LOWEST  
LEVEL OF QUALITY IN THE VIETNAMESE BUREAUCRATIC AND  
SECURITY HIERARCHY. ANYBODY WHO HAS ANY SKILLS OR ANY  
CONNECTIONS GETS OUT OF THIS AREA, IF THEY ARE EVER  
EVEN ASSIGNED THERE. THIS HAS MEANT A STEADY RUN OF  
UNRESPONSIVE LOCAL OFFICIALS WHO CONTINUE TO LINE  
THEIR OWN POCKETS THROUGH EXPLOITATION OF THE DEMAND  
FOR ACCESS TO LOCAL LANDS FOR AGRICULTURAL PURPOSES.

5. (C) PUBLIC RESENTMENT ON RELIGIOUS GROUNDS HAS ALSO  
OCCURRED FROM TIME TO TIME BECAUSE LOCAL OFFICIALS  
HAVE ACTED TO DISRUPT HOUSE CHURCH ACTIVITIES AND TO

TEAR DOWN "ILLEGAL" STRUCTURES. BUT, DAHLIN SAID, THERE APPEARS TO BE NO REAL EVIDENCE THIS WAS INVOLVED IN THE RECENT EVENTS OF FEBRUARY. SHE NOTES THERE WAS NO RPT NO INDICATION OF DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE HIGHLAND PROVINCE OF LAM DONG, THE ONE PROVINCE IN THE REGION WHERE THE CENTRAL AUTHORITIES HAVE ALREADY DECIDED THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY OF PERMITTING ADDITIONAL RESETTLEMENT BECAUSE OF THE EXTREME POVERTY OF THE AREA. SHE BELIEVES, AS DO HER SOURCES, THAT THE LAND ISSUE HAS BEEN AND REMAINS THE NUMBER ONE PROBLEM IN THE REGION.

16. (C) BASED ON DISCUSSIONS WITH FOREIGNERS AND  
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PAGE 04 HANOI 00598 01 OF 02 150056Z  
VIETNAMESE FRIENDS WHO WERE IN THE AREA DURING THE DEMONSTRATIONS, DAHLIN ALSO SAID THE NUMBERS OF DEMONSTRATORS REPORTED IN PRESS STORIES ARE WIDELY EXAGGERATED. SHE SAID THE LARGEST DEMONSTRATION WAS PROBABLY NO MORE THAN A THOUSAND PEOPLE, STILL A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER FOR SUCH AN EVENT, GATHERED FROM A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT VILLAGES IN BOTH GIA LAI AND DAK LAK. BUT THIS NUMBER IS WELL UNDER THE 10 TO 20,000 WHICH SOME SOURCES HAVE CLAIMED WERE ASSEMBLED. THERE WAS ROCK-THROWING, CLASHES WITH THE POLICE, AND CERTAINLY FLAGS AND BANNERS ADVOCATING THE FOUNDATION OF THE "DEGA KINGDOM" AS OUTSIDERS CLAIMED AND THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT HAS ACKNOWLEDGED.

17. (C) DAHLIN RECOUNTED ATTENDING AN EARLY-FEBRUARY FUNCTION AT WHICH A NUMBER OF VIETNAMESE MILITARY WERE PRESENT AND SHE HEARD THEM LAUGHING AND SAW THEM STANDING UP TO TOAST THE "NEW STATE OF DEGA." ASKED WHAT WAS GOING ON THEY RECOUNTED THE HIGHLAND DEMONSTRATIONS AND BANNERS WITH MUCH LAUGHTER AND CLEARLY HAD NO CONCERNS THAT THIS REPRESENTED ANY KIND OF "THREAT" TO THE AUTHORITIES OR TO STABILITY IN THE REGION. DAHLIN SAID THE DISPATCH OF MILITARY PERSONNEL IN FEBRUARY TO THE AREA REPRESENTED CLEAR INDICATION THE JANUARY EVENTS HAD NOT BEEN REPORTED IN TIME TO THE CENTRAL AUTHORITIES. IF IT HAD BEEN REPORTED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, DAHLIN BELIEVED THE VIETNAMESE WOULD HAVE FIRST SENT SENIOR PARTY AND GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL TO THE AREA TO TRY TO DEFUSE THE SITUATION. THAT THEY DID SEND THE MILITARY WAS PROBABLY STILL AN EFFORT BY THE HANOI LEADERS TO DEFUSE THIS ISSUE, SINCE THEY TOO RECOGNIZED THE USE OF LOCAL POLICE OR MILITIA FORCES WOULD ONLY HAVE INFLAMED CONFRONTATIONS WITH THE LOCAL POPULATION.

18. (C) DAHLIN ACKNOWLEDGED THERE WAS VIOLENCE IN THE EARLY FEBRUARY DEMONSTRATIONS AND ATTRIBUTES PART OF THIS TO THE FACT THERE APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN NO RESPONSE TO POPULAR PROTEST TOWARD THE END OF JANUARY. ACCORDING TO DAHLIN, WHEN THE FIRST PROTESTS OCCURRED VINACAFE AND OTHER PLANTATION OWNERS SENT SOME OF THEIR "SECURITY GUARDS" TO BREAK UP THE DEMONSTRATIONS. SHE IMPLIED THEY HAD BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR MUCH OF THE EARLY VIOLENCE AND IT WAS IN PART IN PROTEST TO THIS ACTIVITY THAT THE SECOND GATHERINGS OCCURRED. HIGHLANDER ATTACKS AGAINST THE POLICE ALSO INDICATED LONG-TERM UNHAPPINESS WITH THE WAY IN WHICH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES HAVE ADMINISTERED GOVERNMENT/SECURITY ISSUES IN THE AREA. AND, SHE SAID, THE GATHERING OF THE POPULACE AND THEIR FEELING OF "POWER" IN THEIR NUMBERS PROBABLY ALSO CONTRIBUTED TO THE CONFRONTATIONS.

19. (C) ASKED ABOUT THE LIKELIHOOD OF EXTERNAL  
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PAGE 03 HANOI 00598 02 OF 02 140930Z  
AGITATION OR INVOLVEMENT IN THE EVENTS, DAHLIN RESPONDED SHE HEARD OF NO SUCH CONNECTIONS. SHE BELIEVES THE INFORMATION ON THE LOCAL COMPLAINTS AND PLANS FOR COORDINATED DEMONSTRATIONS WAS SPREAD BY WORD OF MOUTH AND THROUGH THE OMNIPRESENT CELL PHONES WHICH ARE WIDELY SEEN AROUND THE MAJOR CITIES EVEN IN THE HIGHLANDS. FOREIGN OBSERVERS IN THE REGION -- FINLAND AND DENMARK HAD AID WORKERS THERE -- WERE ENCOURAGED BY THEIR COUNTERPARTS TO TAKE HOLIDAYS IN THE COASTAL AREAS BECAUSE THERE WAS A GENUINE DESIRE TO ENSURE THEY WERE NOT HURT IN THE MIDST OF ANY CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN THE LOCAL POPULATION AND THE MILITARY. DEMONSTRATING THE INEPTITUDE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES, DAHLIN SAID AN INDONESIAN COFFEE DELEGATION TRAVELING BY VAN IN DAK LAK WAS APPREHENDED BY MILITIA FORCES AND WAS EXCLUDED FROM FURTHER TRAVEL IN THE AREA BECAUSE "THEIR TRIBE DID NOT HAVE SETTLEMENTS IN THAT PART OF DAK LAK."

110. (C) CHARGE ASKED DAHLIN WHO IF ANYONE HAD GONE BACK IN AND WHETHER SHE -- BECAUSE OF SWEDEN'S SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH VIETNAM -- MIGHT TRY TO BE AMONG THE FIRST TO RETURN TO THE AREA TO SEE WHAT IS GOING ON.

DAH LIN, WHO HAD JUST RETURNED FROM SWEDEN ON MONDAY, SAID SHE INDEED PLANNED TO TALK WITH HER AMBASSADOR ABOUT DOING THAT, PERHAPS AS EARLY AS NEXT WEEK. HER INITIAL THOUGHT IS TO PURSUE ACCESS AS PART OF A POSSIBLE VISIT TO A SWEDISH BUSINESS OPERATION IN THE AREA BUT SAID SHE MIGHT ALSO TRY TO GO THERE DIRECTLY FOR A "TOURIST" VISIT. SHE SAID SHE DID NOT BELIEVE THE VIETNAMESE WILL STONEWALL THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS FOR  
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PAGE 04 HANOI 00598 02 OF 02 140930Z  
MUCH LONGER NOW THAT THE PRESS TRIP IS UNDERWAY. BUT, SHE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE HARD FOR THE VIETNAMESE TO PERMIT A VERY WIDE ACCESS FOR DIPLOMATS TO ANY OF THE REALLY TROUBLED AREAS.

11. (C) COMMENT: DAHLIN'S LONG-TERM WORK IN VIETNAM AND HER EXCELLENT SOURCES IN THE COUNTRY MAKES HER VIEWS A HIGHLY VALUABLE CONTRAST TO THE SELF-INTERESTED AND INFLAMMATORY COMMENTARIES WHICH HAVE DOMINATED THE PUBLIC MEDIA. THERE IS STILL MUCH TO BE LEARNED ABOUT THE UNDERLYING CAUSES AND THE NATURE OF THE EVENTS WHICH OCCURRED IN JANUARY-FEBRUARY BUT THIS PERSPECTIVE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED CAREFULLY BEFORE THE USG COMMITS ITSELF TOO BROADLY TO ACCEPTING THE ASSERTIONS OF OVERSEAS-BASED, INTEREST GROUPS.  
HARTER

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